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AUTHOR Glenn, Robert J., III
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ABSTRACT

An exercise allows students to take a turn at setting a standard for instructors and, when done in groups, can encourage student socialization and interaction and build skill in constructing and presenting arguments. The exercise is in three parts and consists of: (1) committee power, in which students are asked to serve on one of three committees which assist the class in planning for the semester (syllabi construction, class policy, and presentations-attendance); (2) group mini-debates, wherein students are placed into two-four self-selected groups of five-seven to pick a debate topic, prepare arguments in support, and present these arguments to the class; and (3) student expectations of the teacher, with students writing a letter on the first or second day of class outlining their expectations and the instructor reading and responding. (CR)

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ED 399 601

TURNING UP THE HEAT: SUMMARIZED SUGGESTIONS FOR INITIATING RAPPORT BUILDING IN THE COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM

By

Robert J. Glenn, III

Associate Professor of Communication

Ownesboro Community College

Presented at the 1996 Kentucky Communication Association Fall Conference--Lake Cumberland State Resort, Kentucky

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A BRIEF SUMMARY OF IDEAS FOR RAPPORT BUILDING

I. COMMITTEE POWER

Students are asked to serve on one of three committees which assist the class in planning for the semester. The may choose from among syllabi construction, class policy, and presentations-attendance committees. The syllabi construction committee reviews a course plan from the previous semester and makes adjustments and suggestions for revision. All changes must be approved by a vote of the entire class. The class policy committee is charged with developing a list of rules pertaining to absences, grading, group projects, and assignment turn-in procedures. In Public Speaking classes, the attendance committee and presentations committee are forged from one group. Their task is to develop an attendance chart, take attendance on a daily basis, and note those who are repeatedly absent so that the instructor may contact them is necessary. The presentations committee assists on "speech days" with the operation of the video camera, timekeeping, maintains the list of presenters, and assists those who need help with setup of visual aids.

Benefits: Students appreciate the opportunity to take control of their learning environment. Establishing these committees and letting them choose which one they want to be on brings the students together in a constructive and affiliative endeavor. The committee system lets the students know that they can work together to make the class a fun and exciting place to be.

II. GROUP MINI DEBATES

During the first week of class, students are placed into two to four self-selected groups consisting of 5-7 members. The class picks a topic for debate from a list provided by the instructor. The topics should not be particularly weighty in substance. Stick with subjects which the students can relate to without having spent time conducting library research (e.g., college policies or ethical issues). Sides for the debate may be assigned or group selected if these is agreement. Then each group (you could have two affirmative groups and two negative groups) prepares a list of 5 arguments supporting their position. Each group member has to introduce themselves as they present one of the arguments, but this can be done from their seats. As the arguments are presented, the teacher should write them on the board. Then each group is given a brief period of time (2 minutes or less) to write down responses to the other sides arguments and then

those are presented. Finally, one represenative from each group summarizes their team's position.

Benefits: The group members gain skill in constructing and presenting arguments. They also are gien a chance to work together while developing their critical thinking skills in a comparatively relaxed setting. With the right topic, students tend to have a lot of fun with this exercise and it also works as an effective way to "break the ice" early in the semester.

III. STUDENT EXPECTATIONS OF THE TEACHER

Students are asked to write a letter to the teacher. Another version of this task can be conducted in groups or dyads. On the first or second day of class, the instructor should request that students take at least 10 minutes and compose a letter outlining their expectations of "the teacher and the class." Make it clear that you want them to highlight specific behavioral, organizational, or environmental factors which they feel will enhance their experiences as students in your class (e.g., "Allow students to ask questions"). Students are then asked to turn the letter in and, ideally, let them exit class at this point. Take the letters home, read then, and

chronicle a top 10 list of the most often repeated expectations. Present the list (omit student names) and briefly explain how you plan to meet or not meet their expectations.

Benefits: This exercise allows students to take a turn at setting a standard for you as an instructor. It also, if done in groups, can encourage socialization and interaction among the students. Make it clear that you don't care about speling or grammar when they write these letters. Instead, you are simply interested in what they expect from you during the course of the semester. This lets them know that you value their opinions and ideas. It also tends to encourage better quality discussions during the term as well.